

GCE
Media Studies

Advanced GCE A2 **H540**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS **H140**

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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G321 Foundation Portfolio in Media

General Comments:

Most centres sent work on time, though as in previous series, there were some late submissions. Centres with ten or fewer candidates are reminded that they should not wait for a sample request and should send all work to the moderator by May 15. Most centres are now putting work online, with central hubs from which all candidates' blogs can be accessed; this practice is essential for moderation to run smoothly. Best practice features the name and candidate numbers of those in the sample on the hub, and each blog featuring the completed construction (e.g. film opening or magazine pages) at the top followed by clearly signposted responses to evaluation questions. Where candidates are working on a group blog, a 'welcome post' seems to work well, allowing them to define their roles in the project. Candidate record forms are best when completed in detail, with reference to both the criteria and individualised comments about the candidates' work. For group work, centres must differentiate between the contributions made by individual members. Centres are asked to use the online version of the cover sheet to avoid potential clerical errors.

Research and Planning

Best practice encouraged an equal measure of research and planning and advised candidates to see this as an ongoing process, representing all continuous stages of the project. Blogposts should not be saved up for the end of the process in order for everything to look 'neat'; a degree of 'messiness' in the process is actually encouraged to demonstrate the reality of the project. The best work is comprehensive and shows strong evidence of candidates reflecting on the process of the production in their blogs, starting with the general and moving in to the particular, focusing on texts which clearly relate to their finished products. The best audience research is that which occurs regularly throughout the process, and uses qualitative methods such as interviews and discussions, rather than the traditional questionnaire. Some research tends to be very teacher-led and therefore does not always link to final products. A degree of independence is needed in order to demonstrate understanding on the part of candidates.

Tasks building skills, including parodies and re-makes of existing texts, often worked well as part of the process, enabling candidates to overcome common pitfalls and led to much better final pieces.

Print

There was some very effective branding across the three magazine components, with the best work fully embracing the brief.

Overall, front covers were the strongest element of magazine work with contents pages most likely to fail to conform to forms and conventions, particularly in the use of images. The quality of double page spreads was variable; the best followed forms and conventions closely and featured striking images while the worst showed lack of awareness of the required point size for magazine copy and often failed to show understanding of basic elements such as the use of columns.

There was insufficient variety in terms of original images in many of the magazines. More variety in terms of costume and background is often required, and, specifically for a contents page, a variety of artists would be expected to feature. This led to many pages containing similar mid-shot or medium close-ups of individuals who were not styled in a way that made them readable as music artists. There were still a large number of candidates who failed to include at least four

of their own images and/or included found images, which is not permitted and often still included far too many apparent snapshots of friends and musicians with little consideration of purpose. In some cases, it was unclear as to the provenance of images. Candidates need to include originals in the planning process and ideally show the stages of development.

Candidates would benefit from paying more attention to details of page layout. In particular, use of space, and use of font colour. Font size, particularly in the double page spreads, was an issue in many cases. Front covers were marred in many cases by text superimposed over images. In the very rare cases when this has to be done, then choice of font colour is very important. Particularly on a front cover, image and text should be striking. Text that is obscured by the colour of an image is ineffective. Candidates need to focus carefully on register and spellings; if mistakes are noticed whilst producing their evaluations the centre should encourage them to correct them at that time. Candidates should be mindful that there is a balance to be struck between magazines looking full but not cluttered.

Centres are reminded that the skills for print work do need to be taught; candidates cannot be expected to arrive on the course knowing how to use the programs and just be left to their own devices. Final productions should be the outcome of a rigorous sequence of activities which develop their skills. Likewise, research needs to involve looking at the contemporary market and not just historical examples of magazines.

Radio

A small number of centres submitted radio work, with some good examples of appropriate stories and a clear attempt to combine relevant sounds with good mixing of different layers and some good integration of internal and external sound clips. As with other briefs, the requirement to research existing local radio products carefully prior to construction is particularly important in order to establish the codes and conventions associated with this form of radio show. At times, the less successful candidates had researched radio conventions too broadly and this led to final constructions that were not as successful in reaching the needs of their intended target audience. In general, sound quality was much better than in previous sessions.

Video

As always, there was some outstanding work, with minute detail evident in the planning, with annotated drafts, treatments, risk assessments, call-sheets and different types of storyboard. Strong research featured detailed evidence of a range of opening sequences having been studied appropriately and of conventions of titling having been taken on board. Where the research and planning is weak, the productions do tend to suffer, and again this is an area where teaching can prepare candidates in a systematic and rigorous fashion for the challenge of producing the openings.

As in previous sessions, there was a preponderance of stalker/slasher narratives, but it was refreshing to see a range of other genres mobilised. In many cases, there was good, varied, controlled camerawork and editing. However, in some cases there was little sense of control of the camera, with an over-reliance on zooms and shaky material without tripods.

Sound and lighting still tend to be the most problematic areas, especially sound levels with dialogue. Candidates need to be encouraged to create their own soundscape, combining diegetic and non-diegetic sound to suit their original footage, rather than sourcing an existing well-known track, which is not permitted for this specification. Night shoots are not advised without sophisticated use of lighting. Title screen placement needs to be considered carefully as does the order in which the titles are shown.

Some openings had narratives that felt like the development of a scene from a movie or standalone idea rather than an enigmatic opening built on solid understanding, usually because not enough work on genre research and comparable texts had been done. Some candidates seemed to have been assessed on their knowledge of film language rather than their ability to make an opening.

Evaluation

At the top end, there were some really creative pieces with candidates using a range of approaches to address the questions. The best work came from centres where sufficient time had been allocated to the tasks, rather than seeing them as an afterthought. In many cases it was clear that candidates had considered the seven questions throughout the project, rather than just at the end. In such cases, they were well prepared to fully address the areas under consideration in creative ways. Where Web 2.0 tools are used, centres are advised to consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of them. In some cases, Prezis were used as just glorified essays, with one box per question. Fitness for purpose is essential.

Differentiation within groups in evaluations is essential. All members of a group must contribute to all seven questions or do their own individual sets. In some cases, there had been limited challenge to candidates where they read essays to camera or recorded a podcast of them reading essays. This is not in the spirit of the task and cannot gain high marks.

G322/3 Key Media Concepts

General Comments:

Candidates appeared to have responded positively to the paper. Most attempted both questions and there did not appear to be any time management problems evident. There were no common misconceptions of the paper.

Question 1

The extract on Sherlock Holmes and the representation of gender was fair and engaged with by candidates. Overall, candidates addressed the representation of gender well, and the extract clearly helped differentiate between candidates' responses. Question 1 demanded that candidates engage with a variety of gender representations on masculinity and femininity across three key scenes - providing a plethora of opportunities for textual analysis. A full range of responses was evident; weaker candidates adopted descriptive approaches while stronger candidates were able to demonstrate analytical skills as well as the ability to construct an argument out of the material available to them. The lowest marked candidates produced work that was basic and on occasion minimal. Where candidates offered description or narrative on the question set they rarely achieved above a level two for basic work. Those that achieved well offered detailed and sustained arguments relating to the discussion of gender demonstrated points made with a range of salient examples across all four technical areas, and offered a discussion of the constructed hierarchies within the extract – either in relation to masculinity, femininity or both.

It was noted that discussion of gender stereotypes dominated many responses, but often with the ubiquitous use of the term stereotype. Further there was a varying degree of success with this key concept: at times it was used to categorise gender differences as either positive or negative without demonstrating how a stereotype can also be subverted as well. Weaker candidates offered simple points around stereotypes and countertypes, often basing their discussion largely around dialogue and body language. However, most candidates addressed the issue of gender representation and on the whole candidates dealt with the technical elements well, though typically the two areas which are traditionally under addressed are those of sound and editing: Candidates are often reliant on identification of the technical element rather than demonstrating how perspective was created through the use of sound and editing, and how this could impact upon the representation of gender. The most common misconception in candidates' responses was the use of the term 'jump cut'. The term was routinely used to describe a cut to a different scene or sequence. Also, Centre's need to be reminded that media theory is not a requirement for this question, and if candidates do use theories of representation or audience in the response it needs to be applicable and evidenced in relation to technical analysis.

Question 2

Overall, candidates liked the question set on the internet, marketing and exchange – the strongest candidates responses focussed on marketing and exchange. The question provided equal opportunity for candidates whichever media area they had studied – film and music proving the most popular. Many responses concentrated on the role of online platforms for the marketing and consumption of media products. Weaker candidates offered superficial or general descriptions of some of these processes, with little evidence of case study content. Stronger candidates were able either to build detailed accounts of the marketing and exchange within their case studies or to show how more traditional practices were being supplanted or complemented by digital practices. Candidates responses which focussed on a potted history of

the media area studied or use of anecdotal evidence on the impact of the internet, rarely achieved above a Level 2. The most successful candidates were able to refer to case study material and utilise contemporary examples in a relevant media. Unfortunately, there are still a number of responses which are using dated case study material in the area of film, such as This Is England (2006), and Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994). The use of terminology in this question was positive a lot of candidates successfully applied the key concepts of technological convergence, proliferation, synergy and the new media language of the internet.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Film

There was plenty of evidence of the good use of case study material: The Dark Knight Rises (2012), Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015), Skyfall (2012), Deadpool (2016), Star Wars - The Force Awakens (2015), Jurassic World (2015), A Field in England (2013), Attack the Block(2011), Monsters (2010) and its use of FourSquare marketing and Ex Machina (2015) and its use of Tinder. The best responses related issues to marketing, 3D cinema, VOD, piracy (Putlocker) and the future of online distribution (Netflix). Often these were set in the context of change taking place between traditional forms of distributing and marketing to digital formats and an online experience. Many candidates were able to offer good accounts of online marketing campaigns, but few acknowledged the importance of the traditional cinema release schedule as a driver for digital versions of film products, and at times, it was noted that candidates had weak real engagement with how film is consumed by contemporary audiences.

Music

Many candidates made reference to Lemonade by Beyonce and the use of Tidal. Good case studies were read on Adele, DrRubberfunk and Dr Dre. Alternatively, candidates equally well focussed on record labels and a variety of artist that could be marketed online, in particular with reference to Domino records. Many candidates flagged how the internet not only created opportunities for such companies but, also enabled independent artist to successfully market and distribute their music in a broader musical soundscape. It was also recognised that the music industry was coming under an increased threat from music piracy in the exchange of digital files. Within music case studies, there was a general trend towards looking exclusively at digital exchange with less sense of how marketing might function online, particularly when considering major labels. Although social media were often mentioned, there was only an occasional sense of the importance of radio or online music aggregators as marketing tools – the ‘shop window’ of iTunes for example or Spotify’s promotion of new music live. Most candidates focussed upon specific artists and were able to show that patterns of consumption have changed dramatically in the last 10 years. Better candidates linked this to the development of alternative revenue streams for music companies, given the ubiquity of digital music.

Video games

There were some really focussed responses on companies and games marketing, including Unchartered 4 using Twitter on TV adverts, GTA 5 and Steam in highlighting the role of the internet in the marketing and exchange and its immediacy as a form of exchange when compared to the older style of box bought computer games. The best responses seemed to focus on point of sale marketing and the addition of downloadable content for games in terms of one off codes that can be used in order to unlock packs or extra missions – which encouraged exchange. At times candidates offered superficial accounts of marketing strategies, tending to focus on the history of games studios or franchises and there was not as much engagement as

expected with the use of online platforms to encourage extended consumption of products, through downloadable content or competitive communities.

Newspapers

Most candidates referred to national newspapers and many recognised how the traditional press is being transformed by the internet in terms of marketing and exchange of the product – including discussion of the use of pay walls and user generated content especially in discussion of the Guardian (including its presence in Australia), Daily Mail and the Sun newspapers. Many candidates gave a sound account of how newspapers have attempted to develop the product through different platforms to reach wider audiences and counter balance the drop in conventional sales/ circulation. Newspapers were often covered intelligently, with a clear sense of how online news content was being monetised as an alternative or a companion to traditional print news.

Magazines

There was plenty of focus on media institutions such as Bauer and the Hearst Group and individual examples, such as Men's Health, were able to show how companies have had to adopt to survive by producing their titles on multimedia platforms and building interactivity into the product. Candidates responded well with regards to looking at how the internet transformed magazine practice, for example, how NME is published for free and how that influenced circulation and how the publication was marketed through the use of cross media convergence and mobile phone apps.

Radio

All too often candidates tended to write an 'all I know' response to the question set' rather than focus on the internet, marketing and exchange. In some cases examples lacked depth and therefore were not offering candidates the opportunity to extend their debates to include issues surrounding marketing and exchange. Popular examples included Radio One and Radio Jersey Channel 103.

G324 Advanced Portfolio in Media

General Comments:

The following report has been compiled from the input of the entire moderation team this session.

Administration

After many years of delivering this specification it was clear that most centres have established effective ways of working and there is clearly an excellent level of support being given to their candidates. The majority of candidates had undertaken tasks that were appropriate for the resourcing of the centre, that had been well taught and which had been assessed accurately. There was some outstanding work at the top end, demonstrating impressive creative voices and excellent command of the technology. The media literacy displayed by most candidates showed a sophisticated understanding of texts and a controlled ability to use the language themselves in an independent and complex fashion. This constantly reinforced the moderators' views of the value of such production work in demonstrating understanding in practical ways; such candidates will, hopefully, find themselves employed in the UK's vibrant creative industry, which contributes £84 billion a year to the British economy (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 26 January 2016).

The vast majority of centres were administratively highly organised and delivered the specification to the letter and spirit. However it was disappointing that there remained issues with some centres' administration and delivery of the component this session: there were large numbers of clerical errors; significant numbers of centres did not send the MS1 or a print out of the digital equivalent; there were a few tasks that were not set briefs; Centres are also requested to ensure postage/sufficient postage has been paid so that moderators are not left paying for the receipt of work. Some centres sent their G321 work to the G324 moderator and vice versa. Centres working as consortia are requested to register as such before the start of the session – it is very difficult to ensure their work is moderated appropriately if this registration process is left too late.

Most centres are now using blog hubs for the submission of their candidates' work, which is excellent practice. Not only does this make the moderation process easier, but it is also clear centres are using this hub as a way of monitoring candidates' ongoing work throughout the component. The best hubs link to candidates' blogs in new windows. There are still some centres, though, that enter each individual blog address on the coursework cover sheets and where these were handwritten there were some issues with moderators having difficulty in reading addresses. Most centres used Blogger, which is easily navigable when well labelled and tagged, or Wordpress which can be less intuitive to navigate; some centres hosted their work internally. More centres than ever submitted work on Weebly websites that worked well when they had been carefully organised (although on a number of occasions moderators had to search around the sites for the finished pieces); some centres used Wix or Tumblr successfully.

This was yet another session which showed that submitting work on discs does not work well in showing the production journey. Some blogs, websites and YouTube videos had been set to 'private' or were password protected without the passwords being sent with the coversheets. In a few cases material seemed to have been removed prior to moderation. One moderator noted that 'Some work on Google drive was very click-heavy/time consuming to open and view. Similarly [some] work on disc ... especially when I got to disc 4/4 where there was a letter saved that included a link to a blog hub - something that was not mentioned on ANY of the cover sheets'. Another moderator noted, 'There are still some centres who persist in sending physical copies of work which is also online. With one centre some work was online and some production work presented physically/on disc (and possibly on the blogs, but [it was difficult to

tell as] the organisation was so bad). This mixed economy is confusing for the moderator but also for candidates; it's not clear that candidates have a clear sense of the 'portfolio' they have created.' At least one centre had submitted planning and evaluation work in paper form, which does not meet the requirements of the specification.

There is a significant number of centres that are still not using the board's interactive cover sheet and, in a number of these centres, there were issues with the addition of marks which required an amendment process, thereby slowing down the moderation process. The interactive sheet really does make things easier for centres as when marks are entered on the fourth page, with the comments, they are automatically entered and totalled on the front of the cover sheet, so avoiding any mathematical errors. Where centres have used the interactive sheets they must print these and send in hard copies, not just put them on the blog hub or a disc for the moderator. There actually seemed to be an increase of hand-written comments this year and these were often less detailed than the typed sheets and/or illegible.

The moderation process utilises candidate numbers, not names, and this was made difficult by some centres who had not included candidate numbers on cover sheets and the few which had not indicated the numbers of candidates who had worked in groups on the front of the cover sheets. It would also greatly aid moderation if centres entered candidate numbers as well as names on their blog hubs.

In terms of centre comments on coursework, the best (and most helpful in supporting moderation) clearly refer to the assessment criteria and balance these with observations of candidates' contributions which are outlined in detail, making it easy to see how the marks have been arrived at. Unfortunately, a large number of centres still make little or no reference to the criteria in their comments, with some centres just writing about how hard a candidate worked and therefore allocating them high marks when application of the criteria clearly indicates the mark should be different.

Research and planning

The journey through research and planning, into construction and then into the evaluation process undoubtedly worked best when presented through chronological blogs, completed very regularly throughout the whole coursework period. Many of the blogs themselves were very impressive, with candidates appearing to have a real sense of 'ownership' by using this platform. The tabbed approach of other formats, on the other hand, showed clear organisation, for the most part, but the 'journey' was rarely apparent. A handful of blogs were almost impossible to navigate due to the lack of labelling, for example. Online work that involves opening lots of separate posts is very tricky to moderate – it is much better when blogs can be scrolled through.

There was frequently an imbalance between the two elements, with candidates providing less research evidence than planning. The best research included detailed analysis of a range of texts relevant to all three productions candidates were constructing (including the ancillary texts), in order to clearly establish the codes and conventions of each genre; this then gave them a framework for the planning and construction. This was added to by detailed research into a potential target audience, establishing audience expectations of the genres being worked within and establishing basic likes and dislikes about content and the format of existing products. This research was then used effectively to inform the planning and construction phases of candidates' work; the stronger outcomes were seen from candidates who gathered wide feedback after each stage of their work – it improved the outcomes of all three productions and led to stronger Evaluation Question 3 responses. However this standard of research was lacking across a large number of centres. Some centres appear to have asked candidates to analyse only one example of a text from each genre, with no conclusion in terms of the codes and conventions. It was disappointing that there was a significant number of candidates that had not researched any texts relevant to the ancillary productions. Of most concern was the complete

lack of any research into a potential target audience by a large number of centres. As has been mentioned in previous Principal Moderator's reports this is an extremely important aspect of the component, ensuring that the planning and construction are guided by audience rather than subjective opinion. It is also an aspect of the assessment criteria for research and planning and so therefore cannot be over-looked by centres when marking.

Research often included theory – as is only right and proper – but as one moderator put it: 'Todorov and Propp are not a one size fits all. It is strange to see the poor men quoted and "applied" to music videos and film trailers. There are enough music theorists out there and also John Ellis' concept of narrative image goes a long way to solving which theory to apply to trailers. One poor candidate even tried to "theorise" about their website using Propp; another moderator echoed the thoughts of many when they reported, 'Some centres have taken to including specific blog posts on theories rather than applying them, which is a shame and not very good for candidates. They fail to see the links between analysis and theory.'

The best planning was extremely thorough for all three texts. However, as with research, the ancillaries were often neglected; a large number of candidates presented no evidence on their blogs of planning of ancillary texts. In terms of audio-visual productions, although some candidates researched their locations before production, there were a few instances of retrospective recce's using frames from the actual construction, which is pointless. The standard of storyboards was generally poor: at this level, candidates are expected to create detailed storyboards for the complete production, including shot types, transitions and clear written instructions. For texts such as short films, music videos and trailers many candidates submitted storyboards of fewer than 20 shots, when completed productions included at least double this number; music videos can easily comprise 300 shots – so a storyboard of 15-20 shots is clearly inadequate. There was also a significant number of productions which bore little or no relation to the storyboard which had been produced, with no explanation given on the blog for this deviation or development. Animatics and test shoots are recommended to help candidates visualise their final piece before filming and invariably identify shortfalls or potential issues in shots before it's too late. After filming, logging sheets and edit decision sheets are good evidence of preparation for editing. For print and web-based texts candidates should be providing evidence of the drafting of pages and flat plans for websites, as well as the planning of photo shoots for their productions. Centres are reminded of the vital need to undertake risk assessments.

Constructions

There was some very impressive work at the top end; moderators, once again, noted that a number of productions could pass muster as professional. This is partly to do with centres resourcing themselves better: the days of candidates working with basic software packages like Movie Maker and Publisher are almost over (although a handful of centres still insist on candidates working in Word or Powerpoint to create print work); now the likes of Premiere Pro, Final Cut (Express and Pro), ProTools, Audacity, Cubase, Garageband, Photoshop, InDesign and Dreamweaver are the norm. Productions generally showed applied understanding of the relevant codes and conventions.

The film and music promotional briefs continue to be the most popular undertaken, followed by the short film brief, which was a brief that is on the increase and which is often done very well indeed. There were fairly substantial numbers of documentaries, as usual, but fewer newspapers. There were also a few examples of both the print-based regional magazine and the local TV news programme that were highly effective and it is surprising that more centres do not undertake these briefs. There were also a few more entries this session of the video game brief, which was done well by some candidates. There were some radio productions. Moderators noted that, where centres offered a wide range of briefs, marking tended to be less consistent.

Construction of mise-en-scene was generally a strength when candidates moved out of their centre setting to use locations more appropriate for their narrative, theme, form and target audience; however, several moderators commented that ‘there did seem to be a surfeit of couples running through the woods this year’! The best productions demonstrated clear consideration of camera angles and framing and used a variety of shot types appropriately. Generally, though, productions would have benefitted from a greater variety of shot types and distances, particularly the performance aspect of music videos. Candidates should be advised to film each scene more than once utilising different camera set ups, following professional practice, which would help in the edit to create more appropriately paced texts. There was a worrying amount of vertical footage, undoubtedly filmed on mobiles, that went unchallenged in the centre’s comments; a surprising number of centres that did not seem to possess a tripod (handheld footage rarely ‘works’); and many were poorly lit, so that the action was difficult to see (although there were also some impressive nightshoots undertaken by some candidates). A large number of videos had focus issues that the centres made no reference to – on the other hand, the increasing use of DSLRs has enabled candidates to have the potential to shift focus in a creative manner and this resulted in some very appealing filming and interesting narrative devices. There was some creative and effective use of Go-Pro too, and drones were seen to very good effect on occasion, although these must surely be used only after very careful risk assessments.

A number of candidates submitted texts which consisted of totally found images (and which were sometimes allocated level 4 marks for construction). Where found material has been used in past sessions this has always been addressed in the moderator’s reports to centre and the requirement for all material to be original has been reinforced in the Principal Moderator’s report for every session since the new specification began; so it is concerning that a number of centres appeared to be ‘unaware’ of this requirement.

There were audio issues in a number of productions and centres are advised to consider either investing in appropriate microphones or asking candidates to produce texts with no dialogue. Centres also need to submit work only through the specified formats - one centre's radio advertisements were only accessible via an apple device. Editing was generally appropriate though, as mentioned previously, pace was an issue with some texts; and some candidates could have shown greater restraint with editing effects.

There were some highly effective film trailers this session (but also some at the lower end that were difficult to recognise as trailers). Most did tend to follow the narrative order of the film too closely, revealing too much, and some horror trailers revealed the source of horror clearly rather than creating enigma for the audience and enticing them to want to see the film to find out more. The best work made it clear in planning that the entire plot of the proposed film had been worked out, with relevant sections shot for the trailer itself. Weaker work tended either to focus on generic identity at the expense of plot (for example, one piece was seen which tried to replicate the conventions of *Film Noir* but did not actually give any details of the story) or ended up being more like short films (at least one “teaser” trailer was seen which lasted for 3½ minutes). There were a number of *Paranormal Activity* and “home invasion” clones seen. Most film trailers used inter-titles appropriately. As noted in previous reports, large numbers of candidates are using the American green age rating screen, rather than BBFC/UK age guidance logos, without addressing this in terms of audience or production/distribution/exhibition context.

The short films, supported by posters and review pages, were of variable quality. A number were exceptional, demonstrating narrative economy and attention to detail – one particularly effective film dealt with eating disorder very effectively whilst another presented a very effective *homage* to David Lynch. A number suffered from the need to balance narrative with a limited timeframe – less successful work either lacked an effective narrative structure and devolved into a series of somewhat disconnected scenes or resulted in a piece which lasted close to two or even three times the suggested length.

There were a few truly outstanding music videos, as always, but in general many moderators were a little disappointed with the submissions for this brief; as one moderator put it, ‘some of the music promos bring out clichéd products’. However, some moderators noted that in the Music Videos there was an increase in performance and less dependence on narrative, with almost all candidates demonstrating the ability to lip sync and shoot a variety of set ups to cover the performance. Some very impressive music videos were seen which demonstrated a clear understanding of the conventions of the form, with candidates exploring a range of genres and forms. A number of videos were more conceptual this session. Some videos captured their respective generic tones very well (a ska-based track seen by one moderator was particularly effective in its use of cameras attached to the instruments themselves, including a trombone-cam). Less successful music videos tended to demonstrate errors which have been outlined in previous reports: over-long takes, poor synching, editing which did not match the rhythm of the song, content which did not match generic expectation, repetitive structure or a lack of thought in terms of mise-en-scene, weak lighting etc. In general, these issues had been reflected in the comments and marking, although some work was over-rewarded. And as one moderator summed up for many, we saw: ‘too many videos that show a happy couple, one of them finds out the other is unfaithful, then they split up.... Break up usually shown on a sofa.’ It is also advised that candidates ‘avoid videos from out of the window of a car’ – especially shooting scenes at night.

There were a number of well-researched and well-constructed TV documentary extracts. Others were less effective, often simply including long sequences of talking heads or seemingly “fly-on-the-wall” footage. In these cases it seemed that detailed research had not really been done, thereby leading to work which lacked verisimilitude. As has been seen in previous years, several films over-used archive material. There were also several mockumentaries which almost never ‘work’. One ‘documentary’ extract appeared to be a single shot, uncut, piece-to-camera makeup tutorial; this was clearly an inappropriate interpretation of the brief. Centres are advised to ensure their candidates do not exceed the recommended duration for this task. The print products supporting the documentary brief were sometimes disappointingly weak, with at least one candidate submitting an electronic programme guide, rather than a page from a listings magazine.

The advertising submissions were of variable quality. Some pieces were seen which demonstrated a clear understanding of the form, being of an appropriate length and applying the conventions of the form, particularly with regard to audience positioning and the underlying ‘hook’/ call to action. One particularly interesting campaign had used David Lynch’s adverts for Playstation and Nissan as an inspiration. Several examples were seen of adverts lasting for over a minute, often to the detriment of the product being promoted. The best adverts emphasised slick editing, appropriate music, an economic use of titles and appropriate casting (a very effective campaign for children’s clothes was seen in this vein). Web-pop ups were rarely successful and centres should be cautious of suggesting this to candidates without access to effective animation/ web-design packages – the few animated gifs seen did not really capture the complexity of the form, and none were seen which included hyperlinks, which would seem to be a pre-requisite. In many cases, this session, candidates had animated three or four frames as gifs and uploaded these; such work did not take into account the complexity of the form (in particular, the nature of the animations included and level of interactivity implied).

A very effective Children’s TV title sequence was seen which was supported by some very good print materials. A lot of effort had been put into this piece (a time-travel series) with the attention to detail capturing the niceties of the form very well. It was pleasing to see this brief being explored successfully.

As noted above, there were a few effective first level of a computer/video game submitted this session; a very impressive Japanese role playing game was submitted by one candidate. This again successfully replicated the conventions of the form, with elements such as levelling up, loot drops, appropriate characters/ dialogue and an impressive plot all being evident. However,

centres are cautioned about using software such as RPG Maker – although this is acceptable in itself, it is important that candidates create as many of their own assets as possible.

There were large numbers of excellent ancillaries for each brief but, at the lower end, the research candidates had undertaken was often ignored when it came to the production of each product (e.g. digipaks with 3 panes, film posters with poor use of font and colour and lack of relevant conventions, non-original images). The best cross-media packages of materials showed excellent cohesion and sense of branding. A sizeable minority produced either a digipak for a single and/or a poster for a tour not a new album and magazine advertisement as required. Radio ancillaries were of a variable quality – the more successful having used extracts from their short films or tv programmes and then created multi-tracked and well sound-balanced, final adverts or trailers. The few websites ranged in quality – design being a major issue. Film review pages were either excellent or very poor, but with little in between. There were some strong print ancillaries, however some centres seem to have been struggling to get candidates to refine the edge of the images in Photoshop. Some candidates found it difficult to use margins, typography and institutional images to good effect; logos on magazine adverts for music videos were an issue here, as many of them were considerably out of proportion. The same could be said of release dates and credits on film posters. Scaling is best judged by printing out full scale during production. There appears to have been a decrease in experimentation with fonts and typography in general. Best practice in group productions was to have individual ancillaries produced by each member of the group, thereby ensuring more accurate assessment and differentiation of marking within the group.

Evaluations

A number of evaluations this year were impressive: well-presented and clearly articulated. Evaluations often differentiate the weakest candidates. However, in general, the evaluation continues to be an aspect of the component which is marked over-generously by a large number of centres. The most useful evaluation feedback had comments relating to each question, rather than a single generalised teacher comment. It was apparent that the centres where candidates had invested the most time in research and planning produced the most thorough set of evaluations.

Most candidates did address the four required questions, though the depth of detail and presentation of responses was often not as strong as centres' marks suggested and the difference between the Proficient and the Excellent was often in the use of ICT to communicate their responses; the best centres embraced the digital aspect of the component utilizing a range of presentational methods adeptly (although some centres mistakenly considered a direct address to a static camera whilst reading from a script covering all four questions, as being excellent use of digital technology). This element frequently seems to be rushed by candidates and centres are advised to timetable sufficient time for this process.

There were particular issues seen in the responses to Questions 1 and 3 this session. In response to Question 1 there was a large number of candidates who only addressed their main task production, with no mention of ancillary texts; other candidates didn't reference existing media products in their response to Q1 - just outlining general genre conventions. The issue with Question 3 was that the responses were often limited to evidence of audience research rather than a discussion of the findings and how that impacted on their production; candidates need to conduct more detailed feedback and then evaluate what has been learnt from this, not just describe the results. Question 4 was sometimes more successfully covered this session, with some very detailed responses which covered not only the technologies used but the processes candidates had gone through to use them. The best answers linked clearly to research, planning and production, with detailed reflection and consideration. The weakest responses were, once again simply lists of technologies used with little or no analysis or discussion.

There was an issue in the organisation of several centres' submissions of group evaluations: all four questions must be responded to by every candidate, yet in some groups it appeared that the work was shared, so that each member of a production group produced only one or two of the questions and as such could only be marked on those questions they produced or contributed to. It is the centre's responsibility to ensure that each of their candidates responds to all four of the questions.

Creative use of digital technology in the presentation of responses continues to be a weakness with many centres, though some have really tackled the issue of presentation of evaluations well, with candidates using a different method for each of their four responses. The best evaluations utilised more than one method in each response. It was disappointing to see a large number of evaluations presented simply as unillustrated essays either directly on to the blog, Word documents or as brief text-based PowerPoint presentation; none of these make sufficient use of ICT - as has been reinforced numerous times in Principal Moderator's reports, such presentation methods demonstrate at best a basic level of skill and this cannot be ignored by centres when allocating marks. As one moderator put it, 'Documentary 'making-of' style videos are always a delight and usually communicate candidates' ability so much more effectively than text ever could'; in fact, a combination of director's commentaries, Prezis, podcasts and comprehensively-illustrated and hyperlinked blog posts worked well. Powtoons, Animoto, Pixtons, Glogsters and other similar platforms all too frequently encouraged an unfortunate level of oversimplification in a high proportion of responses and are not recommended. Scribd tended just to be an embedded Word document – which is not creative use of ICT - and Emaze presentations were often just the essay pasted into the digital format, and these were frequently lacking sufficient depth, detail of illustrative material. More than one centre used structured role plays (Culture Show, MTV Interview etc.) to justify the responses to the four questions; at its best this was an inventive and creative approach – but less successful attempts appeared strange and took the focus off the importance of the questions they were addressing. Some candidates presented video responses that were 20 minutes long, which demonstrated their engagement but which were very difficult to moderate - a well-focused, well-illustrated 5-minute response should be long enough. Also, it is vital that when there are group presentations, candidates either introduce themselves or are captioned, so moderators can identify them and their respective contributions.

Overall it is clear that most centres are working within the spirit of the specification and there is clearly excellent support being given to candidates. Some centres, though, do need to look back at previous reports and revisit the specification in order to ensure they have effective understanding of the basic requirements and advise and guide candidates accordingly. Departments should ensure that they have access to the individualised moderator's report on their centre available via Interchange or from their examination officer.

G325 Critical Perspectives in Media

General Comments:

In general, the performance of candidates was in keeping with the previous year, with Question 1b opening up opportunities to write about media language and audience theory.

The use of contemporary media examples remains fundamental and, surprisingly as this has improved year on year, there appeared to be something of a ‘blip’ this year with far too many candidates devoting too much of their Section B answer to historical examples, especially in answers on the collective identity of youth. However, deployment of recent critical theory or media appears to be increasing with each session, with many candidates able to demonstrate personal engagement with their own mediated citizenship through theoretical approaches encountered on their course.

One issue for centres to address is the problem of a scattergun, somewhat ‘disconnected’ approach to theorists. In a significant number of scripts, candidates made reference to a range of theorists and a range of theoretical ideas but often attributed the wrong ideas to the theorists or either simplified or over-stated their contributions.

In section B essays, many candidates tried to incorporate too many texts and did not generally explain each one with the appropriate clarity required in order to make sense, often flitting from one text to another; in these instances responses were subsequently too undeveloped.

Avoidable shortcomings in otherwise proficient answers remain – these are described below.

Comments on Individual Questions:

1a) Stronger responses devoted equal time to AS and A2 productions (and other media production work if applicable) and clearly signposted progress over time throughout the answer. The distinction between general research and planning, production techniques and / or use of audience feedback and the strategic adoption or subversion of media conventions was the key distinguishing feature of level 4 answers. Top level answers also featured a range of specific textual examples at the ‘micro’ level rather than broad genre traits or the more obvious end of the scale of audience expectations. The strongest answers drew conclusions from carefully-chosen examples from real media texts and explained how these informed decisions made. Many candidates chose to point out the value of research and planning at the broader level but failed to explain examples in any detail. Most candidates provided evidence of the progression from AS to Advanced but the higher marked responses gave specific examples linked to production outcomes. An omission in many level 2 answers was the link to media production outcomes. Candidates in this category would describe research or planning that had been undertaken, but with little sense of what impact this had had on the productions themselves or the decisions they had made.

1b) The majority of candidates explored their A2 productions with effective and detailed analysis of media language within their final products. A minority of candidates focused too heavily on the inclusion of theoretical concepts at the expense of the application of concepts to their own production outcomes. It was pleasing to see a wide variety of responses that clearly demonstrated a wide range of relevant ideas about media language and how it communicated meaning to audiences. A tiny minority focused more on audiences rather than media language, but they were credited accordingly. Generally, the nature of the question allowed for a broad range of different theorists to be cited, most of which could be credited. Once again, a politically problematic tendency for candidates to explain that they objectified women to ‘apply’ the male

gaze in their work was common, sometimes by the same candidates who went on to offer proficient analyses of gender representation and Butlerian ‘troubling’ in section B.

Section B: Collective identity, contemporary media regulation, media in the online age and postmodern media were the most popular themes. We media and democracy was popular this session and is close to reaching the ‘most popular’ list. Global media remains a minority choice. For all themes, level 4 answers were contemporary in flavour with the significant exception of, with some irony, the collective identity / representation of youth and a minority of answers on postmodern media and regulation. As stated each year, please note applying classic media theories to current examples is a perfectly valid approach.

Contemporary media regulation had a very mixed response this year, with some sophisticated work handling current case studies - Leverson, copyright law, social media, recent ownership cases and big data / surveillance side by side with some very outdated and often inaccurate answers relying on Bandura and the Jamie Bulger case. Stronger responses discussed the difficulties in regulating the internet and were able to incorporate ideas of freedom of speech, hegemony, we media and self-regulation into their argument with clear connections made to the difficulties faced by the BBFC, OFCOM and IPSO.

Global media was chosen by a very small number of candidates, with the strongest of these carefully weighing up the arguments and utilising contrasting examples to support arguments.

Media and collective identity was by far the most popular topic with youth, gender and British Muslims dominating answers. The best answers were, again, able to discuss and apply concepts such as mediation, stereotyping, gatekeeping, construction, masculinity and femininity. Many strong answers analysed the representation of women with excellent deconstructions of historical and modern adverts to apply theory and discussion. As stated above, far too many answers on youth devoted half the response to historical examples – in particular Quadrophenia. Where case studies moved more artfully from the past to the present day, mods and rockers was linked through to Harry Brown, Sket, The Selfish Giant, Attack the Block and back to The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, media representations in the press and contemporary examples of youth representing themselves (eg Zoella, Pewdie Pie). Although a comparison of the moral panic around mods and rockers and the London Riots more recently is interesting, the contexts are very different and candidates often failed to explore the issues of comparing fiction with news mediation. Some strong responses on representations of Islam really got to grips with the complexities of representation, identity and pluralism. One key issue it is important to foreground again is that it is ESSENTIAL for candidates to refer to media theories (of representation, of identity, of ideology, of resistance) when discussing the representation of social groups and the impact of this on identity. Merely describing representations, how they have changed and expressing an untheorised personal view – even if related well to own mediated experience – is insufficient for a mark above level 2.

Postmodern media was once again theoretically well judged by many candidates, with Lyotard, Baudrillard and Jameson often well-handled and the level 4 responses managing to move between micro textual examples (e.g. of bricolage, self-reflexivity, intertextuality, parody) with macro societal themes – mediated reality, death of grand narratives, history on its side. Overall, examiners reported once again that candidates nearly always discussed a good range of cross media texts, and incorporated this into discussion of theories and theorists.

Media in the online age was often tackled well with students working with a good range of current issues and contemporary industry knowledge. The music industry was the most popular area, with candidates discussing issues related to artists' rights and the development of iTunes, Spotify and Tidal. However, the use of academic theory (e.g. Gauntlett) and critical voice to assess the various debates about winners and losers / societal issues was sometimes simplified or inaccurately mapped between writer and theory. Where a well judged range of examples was put to work, candidates oscillated around discussions of the Arab Spring, the Paris/ Brussels attacks, rise of citizen journalism, theories from Dan Gilmoor, The long Tail, and the cyber dystopians (Andrew Keen etc.).

We Media and democracy answers were, again, well blended with aspects of the online age theme – thus the comments above apply here also. The strongest responses offered debate around conflicting theories as to whether the web can be democratic or not given the way in which it is used for different purposes by citizens and those 'in control'. Strong responses developed this by using case studies to focus an argument exploring contrasting theories (e.g. Gauntlett and Morozov) and the highest marked were able to respond to very recent events – such as the EU referendum campaigns.

General advice for section B is consistent with previous sessions – answers should be balanced, academically informed, current and forward thinking and, wherever possible, a sense of candidates' reflecting on their own media culture should emerge in their writing.

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